



ELECTION FOCUS 2008



July 25, 2008

No. 11

Inside This Issue:

[America.gov](#) | [Polls](#) | [Campaign 2008](#) | [Articles](#) | [Upcoming Events](#)



Surrogates' Off-Message Remarks Can Hurt Presidential Candidates (07-24-2008)

Insensitive comments, misstatements, gaffes rock McCain, Obama campaigns

Ill-chosen comments by surrogates for 2008 presidential candidates John McCain and Barack Obama have rocked both campaigns, political experts tell America.gov. Remarks that conflict with or distract from the message candidates are trying to send voters are a recurring feature of the 2008 presidential race.

Presidential Candidates Briefly Visit New Mexico (07-21-2008)

District New Mexico politicians from both parties call for lower gasoline prices

New Mexico, considered a battleground state in the upcoming November election, is getting attention from the presidential candidates. In recent weeks both Barack Obama and John McCain paid quick visits to the state's 1st Congressional District, holding events in Albuquerque, the state's largest city. In June, **Obama** held a meeting with working women to discuss ways to improve benefits for working families. In an interview with the Albuquerque Journal newspaper, he discussed his plans for reaching out to Hispanics, who heavily favored Hillary Clinton in the primaries. About 40 percent of New Mexico voters are Hispanic. **McCain**, a senator from the neighboring state of Arizona, touted his knowledge of border security issues. He also discussed his vision to expand the missions of two major state employers, the Los Alamos and Sandia national laboratories, in developing alternative energy sources.



John McCain speaks at the NAACP convention in Cincinnati, Ohio.

John McCain, Barack Obama Debate War Policies (07-17-2008)

Domestic issues dominate candidates' discussions with African-American voters.

As they campaigned in battleground states and reached out to minority voters, the presidential candidates seemed eager to prove they are prepared to deal with the lagging economy and ready to handle challenging security issues as commander in chief. A recent Washington Post-ABC News poll found 72 percent of Americans say McCain would make a good commander in chief, compared to 48 percent who say the same about Obama.



Barack Obama talks about Iraq in a speech in Washington.

Presidential Candidates' Foreign Policy Advisers a Diverse Group (07-17-2008)

Teams reflect mix of philosophies, backgrounds, approaches

Foreign scholars, journalists and government officials closely monitor the latest foreign policy pronouncements of American presidential candidates, but they also pay close attention to the candidates' foreign policy advisers, who can influence strongly the course of a new presidency. During his presidential campaign, George W. Bush surrounded himself with people experienced in foreign policy and national security, many with a so-called neoconservative political philosophy.

Blogs at America.gov - CAMPAIGN TRAIL TALK

<http://blogs.america.gov/campaign/>

Provides running commentary and information on the 2008 elections in the United States. This blog keeps readers up to date on news, rumors and political chatter surrounding thousands of political races. Readers may ask questions about the electoral process, post their comments about the candidates, and generally guide the discussion.

From the blog:

[MTV's Street Team 08 – Consumers vote with their wallets](#) - By Michelle Austein, 23 July 2008

American consumers can show support for their candidate by purchasing T-shirts, buttons, bumper stickers, posters, pins and hats featuring the names "Barack Obama" or "John McCain." MTV's Kentucky reporter, Lauren, went to a local clothing store to see which candidate was connecting better with shoppers.

[New York Times rejects McCain's op-ed](#) - By Michelle Austein, 22 July 2008

On July 14, presumed Democratic nominee Barack Obama published an [op-ed in the New York Times](#) about his plans for Iraq. A week later, presumed Republican nominee John McCain decided to respond with his own opinion piece - but the newspaper opted not to publish it.

[Obama's whirlwind world tour carries political risks](#) - By Michelle Austein, 21 July 2008

Barack Obama is halfway around the world trying to convince American voters that he has what it takes to be the next commander in chief. U.S. presidential candidates typically use overseas travel to showcase their presidential qualities – ease with foreign leaders, knowledge of world affairs and general "gravitas" (or seriousness of bearing and purpose).

Daily updated information is available at a special **U.S. Elections** page at:

<http://uspolitics.america.gov/uspolitics/elections/>

POLLS

[New state polls show good news for McCain](#) - CNN Ticker – July 24, 2008

(CNN) — During a week he's struggling to wrestle media attention away from Barack Obama's trip abroad, new polls out Thursday show John McCain has narrowed the gap in four crucial battleground states.

[Democrats Highly Critical of New Yorker Cover, Republicans Say It Was Okay](#) - Pew Research Center, July 24, 2008

Among those who actually saw the Obama cover – roughly half of the public (51%) – the verdict was decidedly mixed. While 50% say it was okay for the New Yorker to publish the cover, 45% say it was not okay. Attitudes about the cover differ sharply by party. Nearly two-thirds of Republicans who saw the cover say it was okay for the magazine to publish it, 65% of Democrats disagree. Independents are much closer to Republicans in their views on this issue: 59% say what the New Yorker did was okay 36% say it was not.

[Gallup Daily: Presidential Contest Remains Close](#) - Gallup Poll, July 23, 2008

U.S. registered voters are closely divided in their presidential preferences, with 45% favoring Barack Obama in Gallup Poll Daily tracking from July 19-21, and 42% backing John McCain.

[63% Say Trip Does Not Make Obama More Fit to be President](#) - Rasmussen Reports, July 23, 2008

While Barack Obama has touted his travel to the Middle East and Europe this week as a "fact-finding" trip, 63% of Americans do not believe it makes the Democratic candidate any more qualified to be president.

[Obama Leads McCain by Nine Points Among Registered Voters](#) - Harris Interactive, July 21, 2008

Matures and Whites for McCain; Echo Boomers, African Americans and Hispanics for Obama

With just six weeks to go until the Democrat and Republican Presidential conventions, the general election is almost officially here. Results from a new Harris Poll show

[Britons, French, Germans Solidly Back Obama](#) - Gallup Poll, July 23, 2008

Substantial majorities of citizens of France, Germany, and the United Kingdom say that they would like to see Democratic Sen. Barack Obama rather than Republican Sen. John McCain elected U.S. president, and also that it makes a difference to their country who is elected.

CAMPAIGN 2008



War Resurfaces on the Campaign Trail – By Robert McMahon -Council on Foreign Relations, July 23, 08

Since the start of the marathon presidential election campaign, the U.S. government has poured thirty-thousand additional troops into Iraq and deployed thousands of new forces in an increasingly [difficult war in Afghanistan \(PDF\)](#). Congress has passed counterterrorism legislation that gives the government sweeping new powers to [eavesdrop on civilians](#). The Supreme Court, meanwhile, has struck down some of the White House's rules for [detaining enemy combatants](#) seized since 9/11. Yet for much of the past 18 months, the steady march of grim economic news has [commanded more attention \(WashPost\)](#) than national security. This summer, however, the presidential campaigns have seized on national security as a dominant issue, offering nearly daily reminders of the importance of resolving two wars.

The Year The Youth Vote Arrives- By E. J. Dionne - Washington Post, July 25, 2008.

The conventional wisdom on certain subjects is so deeply rooted that no amount of evidence disturbs its hold. That's how it is with those dreary predictions that young Americans just won't vote.

Obama says his foreign tour will reassure Americans – Reuters, 25 July, 2008

U.S. presidential candidate Barack Obama hopes his visit to Europe and the Middle East will show U.S. voters that he is a safe pair of hands, the Democrat said in an interview on Friday. "It has also allowed me to send a message to the American people that the judgments I have made and the judgments I will make are ones that are going to result in them being safer," he added. It was not clear when the interview was conducted.

Domestic Reality Check on Obamania Abroad - By Frank Newport - Gallup, July 24, 2008

Gallup polling in Europe shows that residents of Germany, France, and the United Kingdom are solidly behind Barack Obama when asked which U.S. candidate they support. Few support John McCain. We don't know if this is simply a case of differential name ID ("John McCain who?"), or if it represents a more fundamental appraisal of Obama's policy positions, the personal appeal of Obama the man, or reflects anti-Bush sentiment. But it may not matter. The facts are clear.

Obama sparks debate: Would Europe elect a black leader? By Julie Sell and Margaret Talev - McClatchy Newspapers, July 24, 2008

Obama's current tour — he landed in Berlin Thursday and was travelling to Paris and London — has provoked an intense debate among members of Western Europe's racial and ethnic minorities: What are the chances of a minority politician rising to the top in their countries any time soon? At the moment, the prospects look daunting.

RESPONSE: ANYBODY'S BALL GAME - By James E. Campbell - Center for Politics, July 24, 2008 ...

There are another three chapters to the 2008 story that strongly point to the election being a toss-up. First, though Democrats have many advantages in this election, these may look more formidable than they actually are. Second, Republicans have a significant advantage of their own. And third, there are some conditions that just plain favor another closely decided election...

A NEW ELECTORATE IN THE MAKING? By Rhodes Cook - Center for Politics, July 17, 2008

Speculation abounds these days about whether this fall's presidential election will produce a dramatically different electoral map than the virtually static one of the last two contests. Will Colorado and Virginia lead an array of longtime Republican states that might be won this time by Democrat Barack Obama? Or might Michigan and Pennsylvania be in the vanguard of Democratic strongholds picked off by Republican John McCain?

Election Calendar



Republican National Convention

September 1-4, 2008,

Minneapolis -Saint Paul, Minnessota

Democratic National Convention

August 25-28, 2008

Denver, Colorado



ARTICLE ALERT

AMERICA SORTS ITSELF. By Terry Teachout. *Commentary*. July/August 2008, pp. 60-64.

Huckabee, a Southern Baptist minister turned more-or-less conservative Republican politician, was appealing to evangelical Christians; Obama, a liberal Democrat who grew up in Indonesia and Hawaii and attended Columbia University and Harvard Law School, was appealing to secular up-market urbanites. If either presidential candidate should do so successfully this year, it will mean that identity politics, in which a voter's political choices are best understood not as a set of rational responses to external circumstances but as a near-reflexive manifestation of his group affiliation, has come to dominate the American political process. [FULL TEXT](#)

RETHINKING THE NATIONAL INTEREST: AMERICAN REALISM FOR A NEW WORLD. By Condoleezza Rice. *Foreign Affairs*, Jul/Aug 2008. Vol. 87, Iss. 4; pg. 2, 24 pgs

After 9/11, the US was called to lead with a new perspective on threats and opportunities - recognizing that it is vital to US national security that states be willing and able to meet the full range of their responsibilities, beyond their borders and within them. This uniquely American realism has guided policy for the past eight years, and it must continue to do so in the years to come. [FULL TEXT](#)

MCCAIN'S FOREIGN POLICY FRUSTRATION. By Joe Klein. *Time*, July 23, 2008, n.p.

Neoconservatism in foreign policy is best described as unilateral bellicosity cloaked in the utopian rhetoric of freedom and democracy. McCain hasn't always sided with the neocons — he opposed torture, wants to close down Guantánamo — but his pugnacity seems a natural fit with theirs. He has been militant on Iran, though even there his statements have been tactical rather than strategic: his tactic is not to talk to the bad guys. [FULL TEXT](#)

Plus - [Google News](#) as well as [Yahoo News](#) on **Elections** updated continuously

UPCOMING EVENTS



Join America.gov's elections experts **Michelle Austein** and **George Burkes**

- to discuss the people, processes and issues that shape the U.S. presidential race. They will answer your questions and talk about the latest events on the 2008 campaign trail.

Date & Time: August 5, 9 a.m. (EDT)

Please note:

The U.S. State Department – IIP (International Information Programs) - is planning to produce and post materials explaining what happens during the transition of the U.S. presidential administrations. We would welcome your thoughts about what you would find most useful.

American Reference Center, Public Affairs Section, U.S. Embassy
P.O. Box 309, 814 99 Bratislava, Slovakia
Tel: +421-2-59223272; Fax: +421-2-54418862
<http://slovakia.usembassy.gov/arc.html>; holotnakovap@state.gov